

**TESTIMONY OF KAREN SENICH
BEFORE THE APPROPRIATIONS COMMITTEE
HB 5044, AN ACT MAKING ADJUSTMENTS TO STATE EXPENDITURES FOR THE
FISCAL YEAR ENDING JUNE 30, 2017**

February 19, 2016

Good Afternoon. My name is Karen Senich. I am the Executive Director of the Boys & Girls Club of Greater Waterbury. The Boys & Girls Club of Greater Waterbury ("Club") has been providing safe, after school programs for greater Waterbury's children and teens for over 128 years. The Club, affiliated with the Boys & Girls Clubs of America, currently has over 230 members and an average daily attendance of over 150. On behalf of the Boys and Girls Club of Greater Waterbury, our members and their families, I would like to thank you for the opportunity to express my opposition to HB 5044, AN ACT MAKING ADJUSTMENTS TO STATE EXPENDITURES FOR THE FISCAL YEAR ENDING JUNE 30, 2017.

I am compelled to testify support the funding awarded to the Boys & Girls Club of Greater Waterbury through the Youth Services Prevention grants administered by Judicial. These funds represent almost 10% of our annual budget. When PA 13-247 passed, Youth Services Prevention funds were allocated to the Boys & Girls Club of Greater Waterbury because the Club has a proven impact on the delinquency problems facing the Waterbury (sec. 76). Through outcome focused programs that include athletic and recreational activities; academic and enrichment programs, including tutoring and mentoring; and other preventative services, the Club provides positive reinforcement and guidance to stem the problems facing today's youth. We are dedicated to enabling all young people, especially those who need us most, to reach their full potential as productive, caring and responsible citizens. This year, 100% of our high school seniors will graduate and go on to college. A study conducted through a partnership among the Connecticut Alliance of Boys & Girls Clubs, the Connecticut Department of Education and the Charter Oak Group found that Boys & Girls Club members had lower rates of chronic absenteeism, suspensions and expulsions. (2013-2014)

The Boys & Girls Club believes that there are five key elements to positive youth development: a safe, positive environment; fun; supportive relationships; opportunities and expectations; and recognition. Our programs are designed to incorporate those elements into everything we do – the outcomes being that Club members have higher academic achievement; are more likely to abstain from high-risk behaviors; are more likely to serve their community; and are more likely to engage in regular physical activity. (National Youth Outcomes Initiative, 2014 Outcomes Report, BGCA)

Annual after-school membership at the Club is seventy-five (\$75.00) dollars, making it accessible to all. Members may come as many days per week and participate in whatever programs they choose. 100% of our members come from moderate, low and very low income households. Our diverse membership is 39.1% Latino, 27.7% Black, and 19.2% White. Our Club members are considered at risk. Like many other urban areas, Waterbury is riddled with the symptoms of poverty. The members of our Club are at risk of dropping out of school,

engaging in drugs, alcohol, tobacco, early sexual activity and violence. Waterbury exceeds the state average for students receiving free or reduced costs for meals and is below the state average for reading and math proficiency. Students who cannot read by 3rd Grade are more likely to drop out of school. 100 % of our members participate in Project Learn reinforces what is being taught at school and includes homework time and support. Students do much better in school when they spend their non-school hours engaged in fun, but academically beneficial, activities.

In a survey conducted in 2014, the following was reported by our members:

- Over 76% reported feeling safe at the Club
- Over 77% reported having gained new skills and knowledge at the Club
- Over 80% reported that they use what they learn at the Club outside of the Club
- Over 82% reported that they were more confident and felt better about themselves since they started coming to the Club

What does this data tell you? Feelings of safety and trust and being actively engaged in decision-making are critical to productive learning in young people. These measures indicate a positive direction for our youth's socio-emotional learning. Ultimately, the positive results created by the environment and programming at the Club lead to more positive outcomes for our youth.

The Youth Services Prevention program is administered by the Judicial Branch. The Boys & Girls Club of Greater Waterbury not only strives to keep its members from ever entering the criminal justice but also works with young people as they rehabilitate and leave the juvenile justice system. If the Club cannot provide young people with a safe and impactful after-school environment, many of them will be on the street and likely to enter the juvenile justice system. We must continue to provide our extraordinary programming to at risk youth and to provide the safe, fun and nurturing environment that is synonymous with the Boys & Girls Clubs. I strongly urge you to continue to fund the Youth Services Prevention funding through the Judicial Branch.

Thank you for this opportunity to comment.